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ABSTRACT

The teacher, a participant observer in the total communication environment of the classroom, can, through systematic observation of that communication, attempt a change in behaviors which will result in an improved teaching-learning environment. One systematic way of looking at classroom communication involves the distinction between the nature of communication behaviors--" substance"--and the shifts from one kind of behavior to another another--"transitions." Further dimensions of the "substance" of verbal communication are 1) institutional events, which relate to managing of the classroom and meeting the expectations of the school; 2) task events, which focus on the teaching and learning of subject matter content; and 3) personal events, in which personal goals, needs, or emotions provide the central focus. Further breakdowns can be made, e.g., in the substance of content communication, of classroom questions, and of teacher appraisal behaviors. At times events are "mixed," as when the teacher considers an event a task event while students perceive it as an institutional event. Communication is facilitated when a congruence of the interpretation of the event exists between the communicators. "Transitions" in communication behaviors are as yet a very little explored subject. Teachers employ them of various kinds and complexity for effective explanation of content, management and control, appraisal of student behavior, and other purposes. (JS)

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CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION: VERBAL BEHAVIORS

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LOOKING AT TEACHING

It is my purpose to describe for you some systematic ways of looking at classroom communication. The teacher is a participant-observer in the total communication environment of the classroom. He or she must direct and facilitate student learning. Further, the teacher must bring to the classroom setting the skills to observe the nature of the communication taking place. By means of skilled and systematic observation*, the teacher can narrow the field and bring into sharp focus some of the factors of the communication behaviors which affect the teaching-learning process. With this knowledge of what is going on, the teacher can attempt changes in behaviors which will result in an improved teaching-learning environment.

The first sub-division which I should like to discuss with you is the distinction between the nature of communication behaviors and the shifts from one kind of behavior to another. The nature of the communication behavior is called its <u>substance</u> and the shifts from one behavior to another are called <u>transitions</u>. For example, when a teacher lectures, then asks a question, and a student responds, we can look at the substance of the lecturing behavior, the nature of the question, and the kind of response. It is also of interest to note that there developed a transition from lecturing to questioning within the teacher verbal behavior and this was followed by a transition from teacher to student verbal behavior. I should like to examine with you the further dimensions of <u>substance</u> and <u>transitions</u> in classroom communication.

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*Many of the insights I have had about the systematic examination of instruction have occurred as a result of dialogue with James K. (Kelly) Duncan and Charles Galloway of The Ohio State University and Russ French of the University of Tennessee. I however assume responsibility for the interpretations and organization within this paper.

THE SUBSTANCE OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS

There are many further dimensions of the substance of verbal communication which I believe may have relevance for the teacher:

COMMUNICATION EVENTS

We have found an interesting substance division of classroom communication into Institutional, Task, and Personal Events.

Institutional Events - are those which relate to managing the classroom and meeting the expectations of the school. Some examples of institutional kinds of events might be (1) handing back quiz papers and explaining the grading procedures, (2) calling roll, (3) maintaining order in the classroom.

Task Events - are those which focus on the teaching and learning of subject matter content. Illustrative task events might include: (1) teacher-pupil discussion on a social studies topic, (2) laboratory work with microscopes and specimens.

Personal Events - are those in which personal goals, needs, or emotions provide the central focus. These events include expressions of frustration or affection, etc.

When teacher and pupil(s) engage in communication events, there are times when event gets Mixed. That is, an event is considered to be one kind by one participant while another person views it differently. For example, the teacher may consider the study time at the end of the class period as a task event, but the student may perceive that the "work" for the day is finished because the teacher has stopped. This can mean to him that the seatwork is an institutional event. The problem of mixing events soon grows when a teacher uses a task event to manage or control; students may as a result begin to suspect all sorts of task events as being managerial or institutional. Likewise, the student may use personal events to deal with the beginning teacher in terms of institutional expectations and soon class management is not possible.

Student(s) perception

Teacher perception

Mixed events are denoted by the shaded blocks of the graph

Communication is facilitated by making clear what the expectations surrounding each type of event are and then getting a congruence of the interpretation of the event between the communicators. In addition, I believe that there is an optimal use of Institutional Events and Personal Events to provide a context and stability for pursuing Task Events. Some teachers over-manage and control and do very little in the way of subject or task communications while other teachers may pursue Task Events in the midst of uproar.

The Substance of Content Communication

Let us now examine the substance of subject matter development within Task Events in the Classroom. Teachers are often concerned that content matter is well explained and communicated to students. We have found a very useful systematic way of looking at subject matter communication which involves four types of elements:

Example	Element
"Our topic is parallelograms."	- Naming
"This figure on the board is a parallelogram."	- Giving Examples
"A parallelogram is a four sided closed curve which has opposite sides equal."	- Defining
"Drawing the diagonal of a parallelogram will bisect it into two congruent triangles."	- Amplifying

Planning for and developing an idea or topic in the classroom through verbal behaviors and visual aids can be more effective when these four types of elements, Naming, Examples, Defining, and Amplifying, are considered in the organization of the communication.

The Substance of Classroom Questions

Using questions in the classroom is one of the ways in which a teacher attempts to encourage and "trigger" thinking processes in students. Many teachers, however, use questions which are for the most part seeking the recall of facts and these serve to stimulate only memory processes of thought. The following classification is a useful scheme for looking at the substance of classroom questions:

Cognitive Memory Questions - call for the simple reproduction of facts.

Ex. "Who was the 16th President of the United States?"

Convergent Questions - call for the analysis or integration of given or remembered data.

Ex. "Can you sum up in one sentence the central idea of the book?"

Ex. "If I had six apples and gave two away, how many would I have left?"

Divergent Questions - call for generating data independently and to take a new perspective on a topic.

Ex. "Suppose Spain had conquered England in 1588. What are some effects which would be with us today?"

Evaluative Questions - deal with matters of judgment, value, and choice.

Ex. "Who was the stronger President, Jackson or Adams?"

Or a further simplified categorization of questions might be the determination of:

Closed Questions - Those which have predictable answers.

Open Questions - Those which have answers that are not predictable.

By examining and experimenting with the questions in the verbal communication of the classroom, a teacher may get some new insights about effective means

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to encourage and solicit higher thought processes and ideas of students.

The Substance of Appraisal Behaviors of Teachers

Another useful area to examine in classroom communication is teacher appraisal behaviors. These are the types of responses which a teacher makes following student communication behaviors. A set of five appraisal behaviors are suggested here:

1. Correcting
2. Criticizing
3. Accepting
4. Praising
5. Confirming

Or a more simplified classification of appraisal behaviors might be thought of in terms of Negative Appraisals, Accepting Appraisals, and Positive Appraisals. Teachers often are unaware that their appraisals of student behavior are consistently of one kind or another. These appraisal behaviors undoubtedly contribute to student attitudes toward the teacher and toward task events in the classroom.

These classifications of the substance of classroom communication are only a few of the ways by which we could examine teaching and learning. By using some such means to focus-in tightly on some aspect of verbal behavior, a teacher will likely discover some very interesting and characteristic things about his or her own teaching. At that point, a teacher may wish to change or experiment with certain kinds of behaviors to discover what effect it will have. To know what is going on in the classroom communication and to know what one's own objectives are as a teacher can indicate what changes would be appropriate.

TRANSITIONS IN COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS

Transitions are the shifts between substantive behaviors in communication. Transitions are as yet a very little explored subject of instructions. We do realize that certain behaviors are communicated for the purpose of initiating transitions. Questions are, by their nature, a type of behavior which encourages the shift to a response. Giving directions is intended to shift behavior.

Some sets of transitions are very short and involve only a few behaviors. For example, if a disturbance occurs in the class while the teacher is talking, the teacher may stop talking, stand silently for a moment, and look at the students involved. This shift in teacher behavior results in a shift in student behavior. The students become silent and the teacher continues.

Some sets of transitions make up lengthy or complicated episodes. For example, the generation of a group discussion involves many and varied shifts in behaviors.

A teacher who wishes to generate a group discussion may ask a rather profound question and pause for a response. On getting no response, the teacher becomes anxious during the silence and proceeds to answer the question herself. Or the teacher may ask a question which is of a nature that the only reply a student can make is a short positive or negative answer. Then the teacher will proceed to elaborately develop another question. These types of transitions may be repeated over and over with the teacher believing all the while that she has a group discussion going. Or what is more likely, the teacher will grow tired of this cycle of transitions and begin to lecture.

Group discussion is in fact facilitated by a series of transitions including questions, silent pauses, accepting student ideas, clarifying comments, and redirecting student questions to other students. The timing of behaviors

and the tempo at which the transitions are caused to occur have great importance for the dynamic nature of the group discussion.

Teachers employ transitions in behavior to control or manage student behaviors. For example:

> Student pokes his neighbor and giggles.
> Teacher: "Johnny, how old are you?"
> Student: "Thirteen."
> Teacher glaring: "Then why don't you act like it?"
> Student looks down at his desk top.

A less complex strategy of transitions in the same case might be:

> Student pokes his neighbor and giggles.
> Teacher: "Quiet, back there!"

Teachers use transitions to accomplish particular purposes. These sets of transitions may be short or long, simple or complex, and I suspect that they are stylized and characteristic of the individual teacher. Such use of transitions help to develop effective explanation of content, management and control, appraisal of student behavior, and other purposes.

SUMMARY

The systematic observation of classroom communication is suggested here as a method to "focus in" on particular aspects of classroom communication which are important to the teacher. The teacher in the classroom observes and participates in the classroom communication. If the teacher is to accomplish his objectives, it will be necessary to look closely at selected behaviors. If management and control are a problem, I suggest that the teacher look at communication in terms of Institutional, Task, Personal, and Mixed Events. If effective explanation of content is the problem, I suggest considering content elements like Naming, Definitions, Examples, and Amplification. If class attitudes are a problem, a teacher might look at Appraisal behaviors. If higher mental processes are the goal, a teacher might examine questioning behaviors. If group discussion is the objective, a teacher might examine transitions.

In each of these areas of concern, the teacher may find it very useful to look at the kind and complexity of transitions as well as the substance of behavior which he uses to develop episodes of communication.